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LETTER ²⁹³

FROM

RUFUS B. ^{Brown} BULLOCK,

OF GEORGIA,

TO

The Republican Senators and Representatives

IN CONGRESS WHO SUSTAIN

THE RECONSTRUCTION ACTS.

DATED

WILLARD'S HOTEL, MAY 21, 1870.

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To the Republican Senators and Representatives in Congress who sustain the reconstruction acts:

GENTLEMEN: I regret that duty to myself personally, and to my official position, requires that I should address myself in this manner to those with whom I am politically associated. My reasons for so doing are found in the following extract from a speech made by the honorable Senator from Connecticut, Mr. Ferry, on the 17th instant: "But I do say that had Georgia for the last two years been in the hands of men of high patriotism; if it had been in the hands of men who were looking to the welfare of the nation instead of their own pecuniary advancement, we might have had a different state of things there from what exists to-day." And also in the conclusion arrived at by four Republicans and one Democratic member of the Judiciary Committee of the Senate that in paying D. C. Forney, the publisher of the CHRONICLE, bills as rendered for printing pamphlets, extracts, and speeches on the Georgia question, I did "use improper means to influence the vote of Senators upon the Georgia question."

Were these the production of Democrats, neither my voice nor my pen would be raised to notice them; coming from Republican sources, they are worthy of notice.

In noticing first the allegation of Senator Ferry, "that had Georgia for the last two years been in the hands of men of high patriotism, if it had been in the hands of men who were looking to the welfare of the nation, instead of their own pecuniary advancement, we might have had a different state of things there from what exists to-day," I would say that from my stand-point I can fully concur with the Senator in this statement, from the fact that for the last

two years, or at least until the 20th of January last, Georgia has been in the hands of a rebel Democratic legislative organization. But as the remark is evidently intended to apply to the Republicans of that State and to myself, as the head of the State government, I shall refer to a few historical facts for the purpose of establishing the injustice, to use the mildest form of expression, which is done by the Senator to the Republicans of our State and to myself by his remark.

On the 4th day of July, 1867, a convention met in Atlanta to organize a Republican party in our State, in opposition to that kind of Republicanism which claimed Andrew Johnson as its chief. That convention resolved to sustain the reconstruction acts of Congress, and to endeavor to establish a government for the State under and by virtue of those acts. It was a small beginning, and the men who participated in that organization were surrounded by all the malignity of rebel hate, inflamed and embittered by the endorsement of the convention in favor of the enfranchisement of the colored men so lately their slaves. And the little band who thus bravely met were threatened on all sides and their lives were by no means secure.

In November of the same year an election was had to decide by a vote whether a convention under the reconstruction acts should be called, and at the same time for the election of delegates to the convention should its call be ratified. In this election the Republicans of the State were successful. The convention was called, and during the winter of 1867-'8 a constitution was framed in which there is no sign of proscription, no test oaths, no disfranchisement. All men of sound mind, who have not been convicted of felony, and who are twenty-

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one years of age and residents of the State, are under it entitled to vote and to hold office.

In April, 1868, the constitution was submitted to a vote of the people, and, at the same time, under an ordinance of the convention, an election was held for the officers provided for in the new constitution, a Governor and members of the General Assembly, who, by virtue of the ordinance, were declared to be provisional officers, and who, if authorized by the commander of the district, were to enter upon the discharge of their duties as such, and were to continue provisional until the State was restored to the Union, when they would enter upon their terms of office as prescribed in the constitution. This campaign resulted in the ratification of the constitution, and in the election of myself and a General Assembly, whose members, as elected, were very evenly divided between the Republican party, the party favoring the reconstruction acts, and the Democratic party, the party opposing those acts.

Under and by virtue of the act of June 25, 1868, the General Assembly convened on the 4th of July of the same year. Among those elected by the opposite party there were at least thirty who were especially prohibited by the act of June 25, and by previous acts, from holding office, they being disqualified by the 3d section of the fourteenth amendment. This fact was earnestly pressed upon the attention of the commanding general by myself, as will be shown by the published report of the military commanders and of the Judiciary Committee of the Senate. Notwithstanding this presentation of facts, however, the commanding general deemed it wise to make no objection to those members retaining their seats, and the Legislature thus organized in violation of the law, having gone through the form of adopting the conditions then required in the reconstruction acts, the State, by military order, was remanded to the civil government thus established.

In September of the same year this legislative organization excluded from

their seats some twenty-eight of its members, who were of African descent. At this point the contest originating from the enfranchisement of the colored men was renewed with all its bitterness. While the question of this expulsion was being considered by the Legislature, I, in an official communication, impressed upon them, in the strongest terms which I was capable of using, the great wrong which was about to be perpetrated, and, of course, thereby stimulated a renewal of our political animosities. Earnest appeals were made to me by frightened and discouraged Republicans to acquiesce in this outrage, and offers of high political preferment and advancement were indirectly tendered to me by the opposite party to effect the same object, accompanied by threats of the vengeance that would be visited upon me if I did not accept their terms.

Upon this state of facts I submit to the honorable Senator from Connecticut, and to the Republicans of Congress who have sustained the reconstruction policy, as to whether "high patriotism" and the "welfare of the nation," or my "own pecuniary advancement" were the moving causes in this political situation.

Notwithstanding my protests and appeals, however, the Legislature persisted in maintaining the expulsion of the colored members. And information of the fact that the reconstruction acts had been disregarded in the organization of the Legislature by allowing thirty or more disqualified members to be seated, and the evil results which had followed this failure to execute the law in the expulsion of the colored members from the organization, was transmitted by myself in a formal manner to Senator Morgan and Representative Schenck, in whose hands was left the question of a session of Congress between its adjournment in July and its regular assembling in December, with the request that should a session in the meantime be had the matter should be laid before Congress. As is well known, no session took place, but on the assembling of Congress in December,

I formally presented the facts heretofore referred to. And from that hour until, upon the recommendation of our firm and patriotic President, the act of December 22 was passed, by which this defiance of the reconstruction laws was rebuked and the outrage perpetrated under cover of it redressed, I have been instant in season and out of season in using every proper means within my power and control to bring facts bearing upon the matter to the attention of Congress.

During this terrible struggle of nearly two years, when delegations of men from Georgia who had been true to the Union, men native and to the manor born, have presented themselves and their grievances here at the feet of Congress, surrounded as they were at home by threats of vengeance and of violence, their assassination publicly recommended in the newspapers, the hope published that they might "perish by the wayside," and that "Georgia should be no more cursed by their hated presence"—followed, as all this was by the prompt murder of several of them as they passed on the highway from the railroad station to their own firesides—let me ask again of the distinguished Senator from Connecticut if "high patriotism" or "looking to the welfare of the nation" would have caused me to press on, or whether my own "pecuniary advancement" would not have been largely secured by surrendering to our enemies? No, gentlemen, the Senator but repeats the slanders and misrepresentations which have been heaped upon myself and the Republicans of Georgia during all this contest. I have the charity to believe that the Senator has been misled by these misrepresentations. But be assured there is no "pecuniary advancement" in the line of strict adherence to Republican principles, and the measures involved in the reconstruction policy of Congress in Georgia. Fortunately, indeed, is he who saves his life, even though he lose that which to every man should be dearer than life, dearer than pecuniary advancement—his good name and fame.

If away out on the confines of civilization a settler is threatened in his cabin by the prowling bands of Indians, troops are at once moved, money is lavishly spent, and the whole country is aroused for his protection; but, on the other hand, if white and black friends of the Union are whipped and murdered in the South by prowling bands of disguised Kuklux, the President is prevented from granting protection because the laws do not authorize him; and when men or delegations come to the capital from the South to plead with Congress for help and for their rights, haste is made to put them under "investigation" with the vain hope that the lies of interested rebels may have some foundation in fact. Are Southern Republicans beyond the pale of protection or justice? Is the odium which we have incurred from rebels because we have supported your measures to be upheld here to bar us from your approval? While we risk our lives and our property, will you aid in taking from us that which is dearer than all these—our good name and our reputation? These are serious questions, and the answer is anxiously looked for by every Southern Republican.

Now, gentlemen, permit me to invite your attention to the finding of a majority of the members of the Judiciary Committee. And, right here, let me express my grateful thanks to the minority of the committee who had the manliness to express their convictions, and to say "that Governor Bullock has acted honorably and fairly throughout the whole controversy."

The Legislature of Georgia having organized under the act of December, and in strict conformity with the previous reconstruction acts, adopted the several conditions required by Congress, and elected Senators. Application was made for the admission of the State into the Union. Upon this the Reconstruction Committee of the House of Representatives reported a bill for the admission of Georgia precisely similar in all respects to those by which Virginia, Mississippi, and Texas were admitted. This bill was and is entirely satisfactory to the

hundred dollars loaned the colored men, the balance of the fourteen thousand five hundred dollars drawn by him while in Washington was used about his own private affairs, (the expenditure of the larger portion of which he explained to the committee,) and without any reference whatever to legislation; that he did not know any person by the name of Lewis Porter; that such a person might have been introduced to him, and he might know his face were he to see him; but that he never heard, except from what he had seen published in the papers, of any attempt through him, or any one else, to influence a Senator."

I am opposed to what is known as the Bingham amendment, or any proviso substantially like it, because it seeks to deny to the Republican party in Georgia the fruits of the political victory that they have achieved after the terrible trials of the past two years of contest; because it seeks to restrain the full effect of the literal execution of the reconstruction acts in such a manner as to promote the interests and the wishes of the very men and the very party who have persistently, and by every conceivable means and meanness, sought to defeat those acts; because its adoption will be a rebuke to, and will destroy, the Republican organization which has maintained those acts and supported the administration and the party in our State, and because any attempt to hold an election there for members of the General Assembly before those already elected have enjoyed their constitutional term of two years as a State in the Union under the new constitution, will result, in the utter abandonment by them and by the party of any further attempt to uphold and maintain the policy which a Republican Congress has inaugurated, and which it would thus be shown a *Republican Congress has abandoned*.

In this connection, the following extract from the *Savannah Morning News*, a leading Democratic journal of Georgia, of the 19th instant, is important:

We agree with our able cotemporary of the

Columbus Sun that the compliment paid to the correspondent to the white people of Georgia is deserved. They have from the inception of this business given Radicalism a fight that it was totally unprepared for. It was in the original programme that Georgia should be reconstructed first. This was a tacit acknowledgment of her power and influence. But Georgia would not and will not be reconstructed radically save at the point of the bayonet. If the other Southern States had followed her lead in place of compromising as Virginia and Mississippi have done, the Radical party would have been beaten at every point in the coming campaigns.

I will not deny that this result would bring peace to Georgia; but it would be the peace of death. Republican principles would be abandoned forever, and the 106,000 loyal men who voted for and carried the convention and the constitution would be heard from no more. There is no "amnesty" with rebels for men in Georgia who have dared to be Republicans and to sustain measures which enfranchised the black man. There is no "relief from the disability," except in death, in submission, or in flight.

Gentlemen, the issue is before you. Your friends ask for the prompt admission of the State of Georgia on terms precisely similar to those which were adopted for Virginia, Mississippi, and Texas. The conditions required of those States have been performed by us. Under this action by Congress we will, during the term for legislation which is prescribed in the new constitution for the General Assembly, give full force and effect to the great and living principles of universal freedom engrafted upon our new constitution by securing the privileges of free education and of a free ballot to all citizens. Deny this to us, withhold it from us, and neither of these results will follow, but the responsibility for the sacrifice of the reputation, the lives and the property of the men who have been destroyed for daring to uphold your measures—responsibility for the utter destruction of Republicanism in Georgia will be with yourselves and not with us.

RUFUS B. BULLOCK.

WILLARD'S HOTEL. Washington, May 21, 1870.